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SUBJECT: THAI FM KASIT AND DAS MARCIEL REVIEW BURMA AND
BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: BANGKOK 02849

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. During a November 5 meeting with Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel reviewed objectives for U.S. Burma policy as well as developments from the November 3-4 visit to Burma led by EAP Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell. DAS Marciel and FM Kasit agreed that it was important to push for meaningful dialogue between the Burmese government, the National League for Democracy, and ethnic groups and for Thailand and others in the region to engage all sides in Burma. Kasit expressed hopes that the RTG could develop a refugee policy that would be more humanitarian in practice, particularly in regard to training and education, job opportunities, and documentation for Burmese refugees. Kasit highlighted Chinese military efforts to draw closer to Thai and ASEAN militaries, and suggested that the U.S. could do well in working with the Thai military as it addressed equipment modernization needs. The Foreign Minister also sought to work more closely with the U.S. on the development of civil society through democracy and good governance programming. Reftel reported the discussion on Lao Hmong; septel addresses the ongoing Thai-Cambodia spat, including Kasit's comments. End summary.

12. (C) Comment: The discussion with Foreign Minister Kasit was expansive and positive in reviewing a range of areas for close U.S.-Thai cooperation. These discussions could well be furthered at the bilateral Strategic Dialogue tentatively scheduled for early February. In the meantime, it will be important for the U.S. to continue to engage Kasit in order to align Thai and ASEAN policy as much as possible with our Burma policy goals. We will also want to work closely with Kasit on impacting RTG Burma refugee policy, as his thoughts are much more progressive than those of most in the Thai government, both from a humanitarian aspect and in terms of preparing Burmese in Thailand to contribute once Burma changes, a development Kasit personally believes will eventually occur. End comment.

REVIEWING BURMA POLICY REVIEW AND VISIT

13. (C) During a November 5 meeting with Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel,

with the DCM and PolOffs accompanying, provided an overview of the USG policy review on Burma and the November 3-4 visit to Burma led by EAP A/S Kurt Campbell and DAS Marciel. DAS Marciel emphasized that the USG believed that it was important to explore the prospects for positive change in Burma, but stressed that expectations were being kept in check. That said, a way forward could possibly be found if the Burmese government would engage in meaningful dialogue with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and ethnic minority groups in the lead up to the 2010 elections. DAS Marciel also emphasized U.S. desire to work closely with Thailand as the effort to engage the Burmese government unfolded.

¶4. (C) FM Kasit thanked DAS Marciel for sharing the results of the visit and for the U.S. commitment to consulting with the RTG on Burma. Kasit encouraged the U.S. to do whatever it could in bringing about change in Burma and, acknowledging the difficult path ahead, urged close coordination with the U.N. Secretary General, China, and India. Noting the recent flow of refugees into China after fighting broke out between Burmese forces and the Kokang, Kasit stated that the Chinese should no longer deny that the situation in Burma did not affect regional security.

¶5. (C) DAS Marciel emphasized the importance for Thailand and others in the international community of reaching out to Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK), the National League for Democracy (NLD), and ethnic groups. Kasit said Thailand would follow through on this suggestion through its mission in Rangoon. By facilitating national reconciliation through encouraging

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talks between the government and the NLD, ASSK could become an elder statesperson for Burma, Kasit suggested. That said, a multi-pronged approach was necessary to improve the chances for change in Burma. As such, the Foreign Minister said ASEAN would need to continue to press Burma. DAS Marciel agreed and stressed that ASEAN was uniquely positioned to press the Burmese government on this issue.

POSSIBLE PATH TO INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS

¶6. (C) Kasit said that Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein had promised Asian leaders both at the ASEAN Leaders Summit and during the ASEAN Plus Six meeting that the elections in Burma would be inclusive, free, and fair. This commitment led to a cut off of further discussion at the summit ("no one was against inclusive, free, and fair elections," Kasit quipped), but was one of which the international community would need to be mindful of and on which it may be necessary to pressure the PM. Kasit commented that as Thailand had had numerous constitutions, he knew well that an ideal constitution was hard to find. While it was obvious that the Burmese constitution would enshrine the military in a position of power in the legislature after the election, the current leaders had made commitments that the post-election government would be led by civilians. What was important would be the development of election and party laws in advance of the election, Kasit said. An inclusive election could be possible if the applicable laws were drafted in conjunction with a dialogue with the NLD and ethnic groups.

NEED TO RESOLVE CONFLICT WITH ETHNIC GROUPS

¶7. (C) Kasit raised the conflict between Burmese government forces and ethnic minorities, which he characterized as troubling. These conflicts were difficult to address as various ethnic groups were involved in drug trafficking. That said, it was important to address the conflict as it would be difficult to ease tensions inside Burma, or to build trust in advance of elections, if the two sides continued to fight. In addition, Kasit said both sides needed to understand that they could not win a more heated conflict.

The Foreign Minister hoped that two sides could be brought together to negotiate; however, the ethnic groups would probably need to agree to some type of ceasefire before the Burmese government would agree to sit down for talks. DAS Marciel agreed that dialogue was desirable but highlighted that the ethnic groups had good reason not to trust the trust the government. As such, laying down arms would be difficult. Kasit said he had met with some of the ethnic groups, and would continue to do so.

IN THAILAND: IDEAS TO HELP REFUGEES AND ACTIVISTS

¶18. (C) The Foreign Minister said he was working with Thai security forces to review border policies, particularly in regard to Burmese refugees/displaced persons (note: the Thai formally refer only to displaced persons; Kasit is unusual in freely using both "refugees" and "Burma" instead of Myanmar. End note). Kasit said he had met with a U.S. NGO in 2008 prior to becoming FM; they had discussed a pilot project that would involve job-training for those in Burmese refugee camps in Thailand. Kasit said he wanted to follow up on this idea with the hope of implementing a more humanitarian policy. The Foreign Minister said it was important to improve the quality of life of the refugees through vocational training and providing opportunities for refugees to work outside the camps. (Note: Relevant donors have been consulting on this issue for some time. End note.)

¶19. (C) The DCM told Kasit that the U.S. knew that Burmese-related migration issues were difficult for Thailand, but that we wanted to work closely with the RTG in this regard. One key aspect in which the U.S. was following closely was Thailand's effort to regularize migrant workers (from Laos, Cambodia, and Burma) in Thailand; we understood this laudable process was not easy, with Burma insisting its

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citizens return across the border for citizenship verification. The Foreign Minister agreed, noting that Thailand had to do the work on both sides of the border, including providing the Burmese all the computer systems. He added that it would be important to work with Thai Minister of Labor Phaitoon Kaeothong on this issue. Kasit said he believed the Labor Minister to be serious in his commitment to improving the system.

¶10. (C) Another key aspect, Kasit continued, would be to reach out to Burmese "intellectual activists" in Thailand, both in Chiang Mai and in Bangkok, to prepare them to make contributions after Burma changed and they returned to Burma.

If properly trained, these individuals could become the administrators and bureaucrats the country would badly need. Kasit said he would like to work with the U.S. to try to develop a program that would provide scholarships and educational opportunities for these people. Kasit also stated he hoped the RTG could work with sympathetic countries to address documentation needs for some of the activists, not all of whom are legally in Thailand, to allow them to travel freely; he cited the difficulties faced by Dr. Cynthia over the years as an example. DAS Marciel agreed with the Foreign Minister that it was important to find a way to prepare Burmese intellectuals to be able to take on roles in public administration, health, economics, and other areas.

¶11. (C) FM Kasit mentioned that he had raised the possibility of establishing a safe area inside Burmese borders to allow some of the refugees to return to Burma with the Burmese FM, so far without a response. Such a region could be established as an economic zone across the border from Mae Sot, for instance, he suggested. The Thai government was building a road further south, from Kanchanaburi to the Burmese port of Tavoi, to increase economic activity between the two countries.

ASEAN AND BURMA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

¶12. (C) Kasit hoped for the sake of ASEAN that U.S. engagement in Burma would help lead to improved democracy and human rights there. Without improving the situation in regard to these issues in Burma, the ASEAN Community could not take develop properly. Furthermore, leaders in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had not addressed concerns in their countries because they had been able to hide behind Burma. For example, during the recent ASEAN Summit the RTG as ASEAN Chair had tried to organize a meeting with civil-society groups but these countries and, others such as the Philippines, had resisted the effort.

¶13. (C) DAS Marciel told the Foreign Minister that the U.S. viewed the refusal of the Philippines and others in ASEAN to meet with civil society with surprise. The U.S. appreciated the RTG's efforts as ASEAN Chair to move the grouping forward on human rights and interaction with civil society. It was important that Vietnam, as the next Chair, continue these efforts. Kasit told DAS Marciel that he hoped that Vietnam would use positively its influence with Laos and Cambodia to push those nations to take positions that were more proactive and closer to those of the original ASEAN states.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

¶14. (C) FM Kasit told DAS Marciel that the Chinese military was pushing hard for closer relations with Thai counterparts. The PLA was pressing Thailand hard to expand bilateral exercises beyond already existing events involving Special Forces troops; though the Thai Navy had rebuffed the request to conduct a Cobra Gold-like amphibious exercise, they would find it difficult to continue to say no. In addition, the Chinese were exerting pressure for ASEAN to move forward with the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). By pushing hard for the proposal, it appeared the Chinese hoped to be able to shape the goals and membership to before the U.S. and others could become involved.

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¶15. (C) Kasit said he had cautioned Thai military leaders not to forget that the U.S. was an ally and close friend as the ADMM discussion progressed, and had suggested Defense Ministers join the ASEAN Regional Forum as the more appropriate arena for expanded discussions. Support for Chinese efforts, however, was strengthening within Thai and other ASEAN militaries; it appeared that momentum was gathering for early adoption of the ADMM Plus proposal. Kasit suggested that an area in which the USG could focus would be to work closely with the Thai military in its equipment modernization efforts. Finding appropriate items for transfer via the Excess Defense Article process would be a much appreciated "token" symbolic gesture, Kasit said.

ASSISTANCE FOR DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

¶16. (C) FM Kasit expressed his appreciation for USG efforts to promote capacity building for democracy and good governance in Thailand. Referencing his July discussion with Secretary Clinton, Kasit said he hoped that U.S. efforts could focus on assisting Thailand move away from the scourge of money politics. The U.S. could share its experiences in the development of democracy, particularly how cities such as Chicago and New York moved away from money politics to broader community participation over the past one hundred years. It was important for Thais to develop a better sense of community participation so that Thais became stakeholders in civic activities, and provide a foundation for better governance, Kasit said. USG assistance to these efforts would be warmly welcomed. Kasit said the best of constitutions could not constrain ingrained corruption; he was frustrated that local-level Thai officials often used

municipal budgets for study visits abroad or for construction projections that had little benefit for their communities. A much more valuable use of the funds would be for improving school facilities, assisting narcotics suppression efforts, and advancing public health. DAS Marciel noted the U.S. evolution took decades, and that a free and aggressive press was essential in countering corruption.

MEKONG INITIATIVES: US, JAPAN, CHINA

¶17. (C) DAS Marciel emphasized Secretary Clinton's commitment to the Lower Mekong Ministerial Initiative launched in Phuket in July; the U.S. saw the initiative as a way of engaging the region, including countries with which the U.S. has not traditionally enjoyed broad cooperation, such as Laos and Cambodia, on issues such as health, the environment, and the impact of climate change. The initiative had attracted China's attention; Beijing had suggested the U.S. and China discuss efforts in the Mekong region.

¶18. (C) Referencing the various Mekong initiatives, Kasit said he would travel with PM Abhisit to Japan later November 5 to attend the first Japan-Mekong Summit. Thailand had informed the Japanese that it would approach this meeting as donor country, with the Khon Kaen University-based Mekong Institute as the lead Thai working-level agency. With China, Japan, and the U.S. all demonstrating strong interest in the Mekong area, Kasit suggested that a ASEAN-led coordinating meeting among the three nations could be helpful, with the most appropriate venue being on the margins of the next ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministers' meeting in 2010. Kasit expressed satisfaction in the expanded Japanese and U.S. interest, noting that previously China had tried to dominate Mekong dynamics, not sharing complete information on their Upper Mekong dams and pushing for the blowing up of rapids further down river to increase barge-related trade possibilities. The Chinese clearly were concerned with the new players involved, he noted (with evident satisfaction.)

¶19. (C) Kasit said Thailand was very interested in following up on the Lower Mekong Ministerial Initiative, asking which USG officials Thai officials should coordinate. Kasit expressed specific interest in the U.S. experience in managing the Mississippi River, noting he had also instructed Thai missions in Europe to study management of the

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Danube and Rhine rivers.

¶20. DAS Marciel did not have an opportunity to clear this message.
JOHN